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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS
TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

SUBCOMMITTEES:
MODERNIZATION, RANKING MEMBER

Prepared Statement of Hon. Norma J. Torres, a Representative in Congress from the State of California
January 13, 2026

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share the needs of the Inland Empire with the Committee as you work on Surface Transportation Reauthorization, the 2026 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), and other priorities.

I have the honor of representing California's 35th Congressional District, which includes the counties of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Los Angeles. The Inland Empire is one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation and is a vital logistics hub, with close to 40 percent of the Nation's imported goods passing through our region; the Alameda Corridor, a major freight artery; and Ontario International Airport, which is not only one of the nation's most passenger-friendly airports, but also a major air cargo airport.

Key Priorities for the Inland Empire:

Regional Infrastructure Accelerators: Our region is experiencing rapid growth and facing significant infrastructure challenges, which is why I strongly support authorization of significant funding for the Regional Infrastructure Accelerators in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization. This program enjoys bipartisan support and delivers results nationwide. I created the Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Program through the 2015 FAST Act to provide technical assistance and support on early-stage planning to help local and regional leaders turn infrastructure ideas from concepts into shovel-ready projects that improve freight mobility, expand transit, and enhance safety. By providing vital support early in the process, it ensures projects move faster, create jobs, and improve communities. The tens of millions since appropriated has benefited many Republican-led districts, showing the program is a true champion of bipartisan growth across America.

Supporting Thriving Communities and Transit-Oriented Development:

The Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario metro area continues to grow, recently becoming the 11th most populous metropolitan statistical area in America. Fast-growing communities need technical assistance and capacity-building to ensure working families thrive. The DOT's Thriving Communities Initiative recognizes the power of local communities to drive innovation if they have the tools to succeed. That is why I respectfully request strong consideration of my bill for the upcoming reauthorization, the *Thriving Communities Act (H.R.2088)*, to provide grants for technical assistance and capacity-building support to help fast-growing communities implement transformative infrastructure projects. In addition, the bill supports Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and encourages better coordination between DOT and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Similarly, I encourage the Committee to explore reforms to make the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program more useful for Transit-Oriented Development. TIFIA provides credit assistance for transportation projects and makes it possible to obtain financing for needed projects when that financing might not otherwise be available.

As we face a housing crisis in the Inland Empire and nationwide, TOD can be a game-changer. Building housing, jobs, and services near transit can revitalize communities, support small businesses, and attract long-term investment. My constituents also commute more than half an hour for work. TOD can help cut down on commuting times, reduce traffic, and improve air quality.

Improving Pedestrian Safety: Across the country, and in the Inland Empire, we have observed an alarming rise in pedestrian accidents and fatalities. The Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario metro area ranks as one of the deadliest in the nation for pedestrians, with 797 pedestrian fatalities between 2018 and 2022. In 2023, I partnered with Congresswoman Bonamici, who was hit by a car while crossing the street, to introduce the *Pedestrian Hazard, Awareness, and Safety Expansion (PHASE) Act (H.R. 4904)* to make our streets safer for everyone. The bill directs the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to work with DOT to identify and implement innovative traffic safety solutions. The bill also authorizes a new DOT grant program to help cities, municipalities, and tribal governments fund critical pedestrian safety infrastructure, like smarter crosswalks, expanded buffer zones, better lighting, and upgraded traffic signals. The solutions this bill would implement are not just infrastructure improvements; they are life-saving interventions. I hope that my bill will be considered for inclusion in the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization legislation.

Wildfire Prevention and Infrastructure Needs: As Southern California continues to recover and rebuild from the devastating 2025 wildfires, we must provide investments to strengthen our region's emergency communication systems, upgrade evacuation routes, and improve infrastructure to mitigate the damage from wildfires to protect both our communities and our critical infrastructure. As communities across the nation face increasing wildfire risks, we must prioritize funding for wildfire prevention infrastructure, including firebreaks, forest management, and fire response improvements.

Dig Once Policy: When we dig up a road to repair or improve it, we should take advantage and install pending broadband conduit, water lines, and energy infrastructure upgrades at the same time. Not only does digging once save taxpayer dollars, but the practice also minimizes disruption to our communities. I urge this Committee to uplift Dig Once, which ensures coordination between transportation and utility projects.

BUILD Grant: The infrastructure grant programs in Surface Transportation Reauthorization are crucial to improving our community. BUILD grants, formerly known as RAISE and TIGER, provide competitive funding for projects with significant local or regional impact. Continued support of the BUILD grant program is essential to help communities of all sizes address aging and insufficient infrastructure, improve transportation safety, and support local economic growth. The success of this grant underscores the need for continued federal support to fund projects like this, which have a direct, positive impact on the lives of residents while contributing to the overall prosperity and connectivity of the Inland Empire.

Freight Infrastructure: The Inland Empire is one of the most in-demand industrial and labor markets in America, with 11.9 million people living within 50 miles of the region's core and just over a quarter of the population aged 18-34. The region supports a warehouse and distribution labor force of nearly 150,000 and is

forecasted to grow by over 15% over the next decade. Strong investments in our major freight rail expressways, including the Alameda Corridor, which runs through my district, are essential to maintaining efficient goods movement and reducing bottlenecks for our economies and supply chains.

Strengthening Public Transportation: The Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Small Starts program is a critical tool for project sponsors in the Inland Empire and around the country to deliver needed public transportation projects. Small Starts projects allow for the design and construction of corridor-based bus rapid transit projects. However, the federal share threshold for projects receiving funding under this program has only grown marginally over the period of the program's existence. I urge the committee to consider increasing the CIG Small Starts federal share threshold to maximize the utility of this funding for the Small Starts projects, in Section 5309(a)(6)(A) of title 49, United States Code, by increasing the federal share threshold from \$150 million to \$200 million.

The Expedited Project Delivery (EPD) pilot program allows the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to expedite the delivery of CIG projects. To allow projects in the Inland Empire and across the nation to utilize this program and expedite projects, I urge this Committee to consider increasing the available EPD pilot program funding share from 25% to 35% for projects in the program.

LA 2028 and Major Sporting Events: With the upcoming Los Angeles 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the 2026 FIFA World Cup, I urge the Committee to work with our state and local partners to ensure that the proper federal investments are made and that the Committee listens to the needs and concerns of the region's transportation agencies and municipalities.

My District is a national logistics engine with local infrastructure challenges that benefit from strong federal partnership and innovative solutions. I respectfully request that the Committee take into account these local priorities I have outlined for the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization and your work this year. I would next like to take this opportunity to share some concerns regarding this Administration.

Concerns with Actions from this Administration

The bipartisan approach of this Committee is one I deeply respect, along with the critical understanding that our transportation and infrastructure programs are crucial to all Americans, regardless of political affiliation. With that in mind, I respectfully urge this Committee to ensure proper oversight and push back against the Administration's continued partisan attacks on California and other states, such as the unlawful withholding of \$160 million in highway and surface transportation funding, and refusal to work on a supplemental disaster aid funding package nearly one year after the catastrophic wildfires in Southern California.

I also remain concerned by the actions led by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and continued by the Administration that limit the Department of Transportation (DOT) and other agencies' abilities to carry out their Congressionally mandated duties and programs. I am deeply disturbed at efforts to close the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) Hazardous Materials Safety Western Region Office in my district, which is vital to ensuring the safe transport of hazardous materials across 13 states and territories—including California. Closing it would put public safety at risk, especially in the wake of disasters like those in East Palestine, Ohio, in 2023. I urge the Committee to oppose any and all efforts to close the regional offices for Agencies serving our states.

Looking back at 2025, nearly 3,300 federal employees were forced to leave DOT, including 1,500 from the Federal Aviation Administration and 844 from the Federal Highway Administration. Many of these workers brought decades of experience and expertise, and these reductions threaten the safety and reliability of our transportation networks, delay critical infrastructure projects, and undermine effective oversight and use of taxpayer dollars. At a time when our nation's infrastructure needs are crumbling, not only do we need a strong surface transportation bill, but we also need federal employees who can help implement the law.

In addition, as we start work on the bipartisan WRDA 2026 reauthorization bill, it is important that Members of Congress get timely and substantive responsiveness from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on projects in our districts. This information is critical as we work to advance the priorities of our constituents. That is why I am concerned with this Administration's policy that stops the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from communicating directly with Congress unless it has been cleared by political appointees in the Department of Defense's Legislative Affairs office. This policy makes it hard to get even the most basic information and updates about important projects in our districts.

Priorities of the New Democrats Coalition for Surface Transportation Reauthorization

As Chair of the Housing, Infrastructure, & Transportation Working Group for the New Democrats Coalition, I wanted to highlight the priorities of the Coalition by submitting to the record a letter sent from the Coalition to Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen on June 5, 2025, outlining the 15 recommendations from the Coalition for the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization Package that prioritize sustainable funding and financing; safe, resilient, and innovative infrastructure programs; and smart planning, zoning, and development. I have included the letter in the annex below. We ask for your strong consideration of the recommendations highlighted in the letter.

Thank you for your time and for listening to my priorities and concerns. I look forward to working with you to advance policies that strengthen our local economies and bring much-needed investments to our communities.

Sincerely,



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



The Honorable Sam Graves
U.S. House of Representatives
1135 Longworth House Office Building
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
U.S. House of Representatives
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20515

June 5, 2025

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen,

For decades, the Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure has developed a Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill to fund infrastructure and ensure the safety of the United States' transportation systems. Since our founding in 1997, the New Democrat Coalition has consistently prioritized sustainable funding and financing; safe, resilient, and innovative infrastructure programs; and smart planning, zoning, and development. As you work in a bipartisan fashion to craft the Surface Transportation Reauthorization package, we are eager to find a pragmatic path forward that meets the needs of the American people.

As outlined below, New Dems are committed to updating our transportation infrastructure, creating quality jobs, investing in our nation's preparedness and resilience, and developing more affordable housing. We ask for your strong consideration of the following priorities as you develop the bill:

Smart Planning, Zoning, and Development

- **Simplify project planning and success** by directing the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop frameworks for best practices on zoning and land-use policies, including common land use guidance.
- **Get projects built and operating quicker** through reforms to federal permitting processes that delay project groundbreaking, construction, and operation. These reforms should shorten timelines on all types of federal authorizations for projects.
- **Encourage transit-oriented development** in line with [H.R. _____](#), the Build More Housing Near Transit Act (reintroduction forthcoming), by directing the Secretary of Transportation to boost a transit project's rating if the project includes pro-housing policies for areas along the project route. This should include a directive for the Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop a methodology to evaluate the merits of the pro-housing policies documented in a Capital Investment Grants application.

- **Enhance infrastructure resiliency and protect taxpayer investments** by requiring state Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to identify in long range transportation plans all assets vulnerable to common natural disasters in the region and identify which assets need to operate during a disaster or immediately after, along with the improvements required for that to occur.
- **Support infrastructure maintenance** by requiring state DOTs and MPOs to detail in their Statewide Transportation Improvement Program/Transportation Improvement Program projected progress toward repair targets and how funds support that progress. These Improvement Programs should be posted on Federal Highway Administration and Transit Administration websites in a machine-readable format and be fully searchable to enhance transparency and accountability.

Sustainable Funding and Financing

- **Support the safety of America's bridges** by fully funding the Bridge Investment Program, one of the most sought-after programs providing federal funding. The Committee should also make improvements to the program by requiring the Department of Transportation to issue guidance for reviewers on how to conduct and document the quality control process to ensure all applications are consistently evaluated.
- **Improve community safety and access to essential services** through continued funding for the Reconnecting Communities Grant Program, ensuring planning and capital grants for communities to redesign the built environment to meet modern needs.
- **Bolster Americans' transportation choices** by continuing to provide robust funding for the Capital Investment Grant program and passenger rail grant programs, supporting different modes of transportation such as buses and trains.
- **Focus on current infrastructure needs rather than creating new ones** by requiring grantees to demonstrate that they can operate and maintain an asset throughout its useful life. New capacity projects should have a federal match of 50% to incentivize the maintenance of existing infrastructure rather than the development of new roads or bridges.

Safe, Resilient, and Innovative Infrastructure Programs

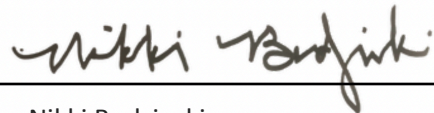
- **Improve work zone and traffic safety** by requiring the Department of Transportation to collect and analyze data on roadside vehicle crashes and work zone crashes to develop strategic plans to stop these incidents in line with bipartisan legislation like [H.R. 2992](#), the Preventing Roadside and Work Zone Deaths Act.
- **Reduce vehicle accidents with animals** and improve habitat connectivity by reauthorizing the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP) established in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- **Ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars and minimize project disruption** by directing the creation of a "Dig Once" Policy across all infrastructure projects involving excavation or roadwork. By coordinating the installation of multiple utilities during a single construction project, such as broadband cables, electrical lines, and water systems, the policy eliminates the need for repeated excavations, which are not only costly but also cause significant disruption to communities.

- **Protect vulnerable persons in our communities** by supporting installation of safety barriers at high-risk areas for suicide, such as bridges, rail stations and crossings, and parking garages, in line with bipartisan legislation like [H.R. 3505](#), the Barriers to Suicide Act.
- **Enhance rail safety** through the inclusion of language that ensures strong federal oversight and expands resources for communities and railway stakeholders.
- **Boost project transparency and accountability** by requiring federally funded infrastructure projects to have publicly accessible and easily viewable signs at project sites with the name of the project and a color-coded system showing if the project is on-time and on-budget, to be updated on a consistent basis. These signs should not be promotional or distracting and should not carry the name of contractors, public officials, labor organizations, or related logos and symbols in line with current standards in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

Sincerely,



Rep. Shomari C. Figures
Transportation Task Force Chair
New Democrat Coalition



Rep. Nikki Budzinski
Vice Chair for Policy
New Democrat Coalition